

Green Cities, Infrastructure and Energy Programme (GCIEP)

Integrating Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) into Infrastructure Delivery: What's working and what can we learn from?

This session of the GCIEP Learning Series shared lessons and insights from our work on integrating GEDSI into infrastructure planning and financing interventions, drawing on the practical experiences and technical expertise of the GCIEP team and its partners. This session offered a candid look at what it takes to move beyond policy statements and embed meaningful inclusion into the heart of urban development and infrastructure projects.

Key learning points and recommendations

- **Maximise commercial benefits and positive social impact by embedding GEDSI as early as possible:** Integrate inclusion from the start of project planning for greater impact and efficiency; however, entry points for GEDSI exist across the whole investment life cycle
- **Consult representative organisations to optimise design and reduce risks:** Inclusive stakeholder engagement, particularly with representative groups, can reveal and reshape priorities and ensure relevance.
- **Identify the missing/overlooked actors in government, private sector and civil society:** leads to more targeted, effective and inclusive local capacity building.
- **Influence widely through tailored and practical approaches that align with partner incentives and processes:** Tools like the GEDSI Lens toolkit are written for developer and investor audiences and help operationalise GEDSI by setting out the business case for GEDSI, mapping actions onto the infrastructure project cycle and integrating into existing processes.
- **Diverse partnerships for greater impact at scale:** Collaboration across sectors, institutions and geographies strengthens potential for transformational change.



The GCIEP annual learning series, in June and July 2025, explored achievements, challenges and learning points across six themes and sectors, with insights from relevant GCIEP work packages, FCDO staff, UK Agency Delivery Partners and external experts.

Unlocking finance through inclusion: GEDSI as a core investment requirement

The session was moderated by Vidya Naidu, the GEDSI Lead for GCIEP, who opened the discussion by emphasising that GEDSI is now a central requirement for unlocking climate and infrastructure finance. Investors are increasingly requiring social benefits for women and marginalised groups to be delivered directly through the investments they support, in addition to more stringent due diligence and requirements on social risk management. Vidya made it clear that integrating GEDSI measures in infrastructure development is now recognised as a commercial as well as moral imperative, with evidence showing that along with enhanced accessibility, safety and convenience for all in society, it can lead to lower costs, better investment returns, and reduced risks. With \$2.5trn of investment needed in the next 5 years to meet climate goals, the vast majority of which will be channelled towards mitigation projects in the transport and energy sectors, there is also a huge opportunity to deliver positive social impact at scale through integrating GEDSI into climate finance projects.

Listening and learning in Dhaka:

Ruth Salmon, at TfL Consulting, one of the UK Agency Delivery Partners in the UK Centre of Expertise for Green Cities, Infrastructure and Energy, shared the journey of a GCIEP-supported project in Dhaka, where an initial focus on bus corridor improvements was fundamentally reshaped by engagement with representative groups. Conversations with local civil society groups revealed significant safety concerns for women and girls on public transport and the normalisation of sexual harassment/violence. The project pivoted to prioritise these issues, launching a dedicated workstream on women and girls' safety, collaborating with local NGOs. This approach delivered improved contextual understanding which challenged assumptions and reshaped project priorities and helped adapt international best practice to local realities appropriately.

Building capacity from the ground up: Inclusive urban resilience in Dar es Salaam

Dr. Mansoor Ali, the Team Leader for the GCIEP Dar-es-Salaam Urban Resilience Programme (DURP) shared the experience from DURP – which focused on food waste and recycling initiatives, with a focus on informal waste workers, to inform the design of a large World Bank resilience programme. Mansoor described how the project-built capacity by fostering a gender-aware internal culture and targeting the “middle layer” of municipal officials in waste management who were 70% women, highly driven and committed but often overlooked. By highlighting the contributions of women at every level – from informal waste pickers to municipal managers -the project succeeded in making actors more visible and building local ownership. Face-to-face/on the ground engagement, process-focused delivery, and trust-building were key to shifting the power dynamics and embedding sustainable change.

Tools for change: The GEDSI Lens Toolkit

Veronica Di Bella, the Team Leader for GCIEP GEDSI Lens Toolkit for Infrastructure Project Developers then gave an overview of the newly developed toolkit, a practical methodology designed to guide infrastructure project developers and financiers on integrating GEDSI at each stage of the infrastructure project cycle. Building from a landscape analysis of major investors, the toolkit fills a gap by offering integrated and holistic criteria for gender equality, disability, and social inclusion – expanding on existing gender-focused models to address the full spectrum of social impact. The criteria were developed in collaboration with 2X Global, and peer reviewed by its members and provides a strong platform to address intersectionality and stakeholder needs. The accompanying toolkit provides actionable steps, metrics, and case studies for embedding GEDSI, filling a gap in current practice with examples coming from pilot applications in Mozambique, Ghana and across GCIEP's portfolio.



Piloting inclusion in Indonesia: Early lessons from the field

Building on that introduction to the toolkit, Bellia Bizarani, an Environmental and Social Specialist with the Future Cities Indonesia Programme in GCIEP, Indonesia shared her experience applying the GEDSI Lens Toolkit to the review of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) feasibility studies in four Indonesian cities. The toolkit provided a much-needed structure for assessing projects, revealing that while universal design standards are increasingly met, deeper policy integration and capacity-building for GEDSI remain underdeveloped. It is clear that structured assessment frameworks help to identify gaps, but ongoing support and knowledge transfer are needed to bridge them.

Driving systemic change: FCDO's perspective

Finally, Catherine Arnold, a Social Development Adviser for the Strategy and Policy Team, Economic Development and Partnerships for FCDO and Raul Kharbanda, Head of Infrastructure Policy in the Green Cities and Infrastructure Team for FCDO both then shared how GCIEP's work on GEDSI aligns with the UK's broader goals for inclusive and sustainable growth. They reiterated the increasing importance of promoting GEDSI, especially in the context of geo-political flux. The UK was committed to advancing GEDSI and supported the need to share learning across programmes and sectors. They emphasised the importance of embedding GEDSI commitments early in the project cycle – within business cases, contracts, and delivery plans – to avoid costly retrofits and maximise impact. The session highlighted GCIEP's leadership in disability inclusion, noting its unique position as the only programme in the portfolio with both gender and disability markers. The panellists also pointed to the value of peer-reviewed toolkits, capacity building, and active engagement with multilateral frameworks, certification schemes and standards bodies.



Insights from the audience discussion

- When asked how to move beyond policy to embed GEDSI in delivery, panellists pointed to the GEDSI Lens Toolkit, used in GCIEP's Indonesian BRT studies to identify capacity gaps and improve engagement.
- In turning inclusive commitments into real change, Dhaka has shown how feedback from women's organisations led to a project shift focused on safety and targeted tangible design improvements.
- Backing the UK's pro-GEDSI stance is an opportunity for GCIEP to actively champion GEDSI in multilateral settings by contributing practical case studies and results. GCIEP can strengthen the UK's credibility and influence for a range of stakeholders.
- Integrating GEDSI early into the project lifecycle rather than adding it as an afterthought provides the best opportunity to influence infrastructure planning. It is important to design inclusion into every stage of delivery, ensuring it is systematic and measurable.

The UK Government's Centre of Expertise in Green Cities, Infrastructure and Energy responds to the impacts of climate change and poverty by accelerating the delivery of sustainable cities and resilient infrastructure

GCIEP is a demand-driven initiative supporting sustainable green cities and climate-resilient infrastructure in lower-income countries. As the flagship programme of the UK's Green Cities, Infrastructure and Energy Centre of Expertise, GCIEP supports the UK Government's mission to accelerate investment in infrastructure and urban development that is responsible, reliable, inclusive, low-carbon and climate-resilient.

GCIEP is implemented by an alliance of private sector delivery partners led by PwC and including Adam Smith International, Mott MacDonald, MDY Legal and Engineers Against Poverty.

Further expertise is provided by eight delivery partners: British Geological Survey, BSI, Connected Places Catapult, Crossrail International, Ofgem, Ordnance Survey, National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority, and Transport for London.